



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Aviation  
Administration**

# Advisory Circular

**Subject: INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION  
ORGANIZATION THREE-LETTER AND  
RADIOTELEPHONY DESIGNATORS**

**Date: 6/21/91  
Initiated by: ATP-210**

**AC No: 120-26H**

**1. PURPOSE.** Advisory Circular 120-26H defines the criteria and procedures required for an International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) three-letter and/or radiotelephony designator assignment.

**2. CANCELLATION.** Advisory Circular No. 120-26G dated 10/1/87 is cancelled.

**3. EXPLANATION OF CHANGE.**

a. All references to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Airspace-Rules and Aeronautical Information Division, Flight Information and Obstructions Branch, ATO-210 have been changed to FAA Headquarters, Airspace-Rules and Aeronautical Information Division, Air Traffic Publications Branch, ATP-210.

b. Editorial and grammatical changes have been made to improve the clarity of this advisory circular.

c. The requirements for placing the radiotelephony designator in the remarks section of the flight plan have been revised.

d. The round trip air operations of a three-letter and/or radiotelephony designator have been modified.

e. All references to call-sign have been changed to radiotelephony designator.

**4. RELATED READING MATERIAL.** Additional information on three-letter, radiotelephony, local radiotelephony and special radiotelephony designators, may be found in FAA Order 7340.1, Contractions; FAA Order 7210.3, Facility Operation and Administration; FAA Order 7110.65, Air Traffic Control; Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Regulation 87.107; and ICAO Document 8585, Designator for Aircraft Operating Agencies, Aeronautical Authorities, and Services.

**5. DEFINITIONS.**

a. **Three-Letter Designator** - A three-letter designator is used in conjunction with the flight number and serves as the aircraft identification in the air traffic control system. The authorized three-letter designator

and flight/trip number are used in lieu of the aircraft registration number.

b. **Radiotelephony Designator** - Normally the aircraft operating company and/or servicing agency name or a pronounceable abbreviation of the name is used in combination with the flight number. The radiotelephony designator is normally assigned simultaneously with the three-letter designator and becomes the aircraft identification for all voice communications with air traffic control facilities and operating services.

**6. CRITERIA.**

a. A three-letter designator is registered for those aircraft operating agencies and companies which, in the opinion of the State of jurisdiction, require a specific three-letter designator. These three-letter designators are assigned on a worldwide basis to an aircraft operating or servicing company for commercial domestic and international operations. ICAO aircraft company three-letter designators may be used on the international telecommunications service when deemed advantageous for air traffic control and operational purposes.

b. A radiotelephony designator should be pronounceable and suitable phonetically in at least one of the following languages: English, French, or Spanish. The radiotelephony designator, consisting of not more than two words and three syllables, should preferably resemble the name of the aircraft company, operating authority, or servicing organization. This reduces the amount of verbiage created on-line contributing to similar sounding radiotelephony designator confusion. Letters are not assigned as a radiotelephony designator; however, companies which have previously been assigned letters as radiotelephony designators will remain.

c. A three-letter designator may be assigned to an aircraft operating company and/or servicing agency which operate or service 7 or more non-seasonal international round trip air operations per week and generate appropriate flight movement messages over the

Aeronautical Fixed Telecommunications Network (AFTN); or, at least 15 non-seasonal domestic commercial round trip air operations per week. Aircraft operating companies and/or servicing agencies which generate less than the prescribed international or domestic flight operations may be waived as deemed advantageous to the U.S. air traffic control system and operationally appropriate by the FAA. Exceptions to the above criteria may be authorized on an individual basis.

d. ICAO Document 8585 requires connection to the AFTN for international and domestic telecommunication services. The AFTN is an integrated worldwide system of aeronautical fixed circuits providing exchange of messages between aeronautical fixed stations within the network. The integrated system permits the exchange of messages between aeronautical fixed stations within the network. AFTN telecommunication service provides an electronic media for transmission of international flight movement messages.

e. AFTN connections are authorized only for aircraft operating and servicing agencies to introduce aircraft movement data into the air navigation system and the exchange of permissible information in accordance with ICAO Annex 10 and Federal Air Regulations (FAR) Part 189.

f. AFTN authorized non-FAA users are required to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in order to access the National Airspace System Interfacility Communications System (NICS) for transmitting non-ICAO (domestic) flight movement messages. The use of the assigned designator will not be approved until the MOA has been finalized. For additional information concerning MOA's contact FAA Headquarters, Air Traffic Systems Management, Civil Operations, ATM-100.

## 7. PROCEDURES FOR APPLICATION.

a. Requests for ICAO three-letter and/or radiotelephony designators should be addressed to the Air Traffic Division at the appropriate FAA Regional Office. The region will review all newly requested three-letter and/or radiotelephony designators with other established three-letter and/or radiotelephony designators to ensure a significant difference exist.

b. The region will ensure all documentation submitted by the applicant/company is validated before data is forwarded. It is the regions responsibility to review and determine if an applicant/company meets the requirements before submitting recommendations to FAA Headquarters. When that determination is made, the request is either denied by the region, or submitted to FAA Headquarters with recommendations supporting the request for approval. The regional recommen-

dation and all supporting documentation should then be forwarded to FAA Headquarters, Airspace-Rules and Aeronautical Information Division, Air Traffic Publications Branch, ATP-210, for coordination with and approval by ICAO.

c. Coordination of three-letter and/or radiotelephony designators are assigned by FAA with approval by ICAO on a worldwide basis for commercial domestic/international air traffic control operations and use in the AFTN system.

**8. DOCUMENTATION.** The following information is required to determine eligibility for an ICAO three-letter and/or radiotelephony designator:

a. Name and address of the company.

b. The type of aircraft operation or service provided. (A list of operators served is required for servicing operations).

c. The intended use of AFTN for international services or operations.

d. The number and type of AFTN messages generated on a daily basis.

e. A copy of the company/operator flight schedule.\*

f. A copy of the FAA Certificate which authorizes the company's operations stating the FAR Part under which operations are to be conducted, i.e. FAR Parts 121, 125, 135 etc.\*

**NOTE:** FAR Part 91 describes general operating rules and regulations governing operation of aircraft within the U.S. including the waters within 3 nautical miles of the U.S. coast. Each person operating an aircraft in said airspace is in compliance of this FAR; however, FAR Part 91 operations alone are not considered criteria for eligibility.

g. Provide at least five (5) suggested three-letter and/or radiotelephony designators in order desired.

**\*Not required for servicing agencies.**

**NOTE:** The required administrative period for approval of a company three-letter and/or radiotelephony designator is approximately 45 calendar days. Failure to submit the proper documentation may delay a designator assignment.

## 9. BASIS FOR ASSIGNMENT.

a. ICAO three-letter and/or radiotelephony designators are assigned when deemed advantageous to the U.S. air traffic control system.

b. An ICAO three-letter and/or radiotelephony designator will not be assigned to eliminate problems

which can be resolved by changing registration numbers or similar sounding company names.

c. FAR 91.169(2)(d) (revised 1/1/91) requires when a flight plan has been activated, the pilot in command, upon cancelling or completing the flight under the flight plan, shall notify an FAA Flight Service Station or ATC facility, thus avoiding search and rescue procedures by FAA.

**10. CHANGES IN COMPANY STATUS.** Immediately notify FAA Headquarters, Airspace-Rules and Aeronautical Information Division, Air Traffic Publications Branch, ATP-210, in writing, when an assigned three-letter and/or radiotelephony designator is no longer required, or a change in the name, address, or physical location of the company occurs. Any designator released will not be reassigned for at least 60 calendar days. Exceptions to this ruling may be modified on an individual basis. Listed below are reasons governing the notification of release:

a. operations are permanently suspended or cancelled for any reason; or,

b. when combining any company names holding more than one three-letter and/or radiotelephony designator.

**11. USE OF AIRCRAFT COMPANY THREE-LETTER AND/OR RADIOTELEPHONY DESIGNATOR.**

a. Authorized three-letter and/or radiotelephony designators are valid only when aircraft are flown for company business in accordance with provisions of the FAR under which an operating certificate was obtained from the FAA. The pilot will revert to standard identification procedures when using the aircraft for personal flying.

b. A new or changed three-letter and/or radiotelephony designator should be included in the remarks section of flight plans for at least 60 days following the effective date.

c. FAA Headquarters, Airspace-Rules and Aeronautical Information Division, Air Traffic Publications Branch, ATP-210, reserves the right to revise or cancel any three-letter and/or radiotelephony designator assignment should confusion result within the United States. ICAO Document 8585 states in the interest of safety, simple procedures should be developed and maintained by States and aircraft operating companies/agencies for detecting, reporting and eliminating similar sounding radiotelephonies which may cause confusion or mistakes in identification.

**12. PUBLICATION OF AIRCRAFT COMPANY THREE-LETTER AND/OR RADIOTELEPHONY**

**DESIGNATORS.** Effective dates of aircraft company three-letter and/or radiotelephony designators will be timely to permit entry into the Stored Flight Plan Program. Affected FAA facilities will be advised of the authorized three-letter and/or radiotelephony designator pending publication in appropriate FAA and ICAO documents.

**13. SPECIAL RADIOTELEPHONY DESIGNATOR ASSIGNMENTS**

a. Special radiotelephony designators may be temporarily authorized only when their assignment will identify special handling required by air traffic control.

b. Special radiotelephony designators are approved by FAA in accordance with FCC Regulation 87.107.

c. Special radiotelephony designators may be authorized for the following categories:

- (1) commemorative flights;
- (2) large number of aircraft participating in an organized race;
- (3) aircraft operating during an emergency or disaster condition; or,
- (4) aircraft requiring special handling for test purposes.

d. Requests will be made to FAA Headquarters, Airspace-Rules and Aeronautical Information Division, Air Traffic Publications Branch, ATP-210, submitting the following:

- (1) type of flight;
- (2) handling required;
- (3) type and number of aircraft; and
- (4) routes and duration of operation.

e. The Air Traffic Publications Branch, ATP-210, will notify the FCC of the pending assignment. After review the pending assignment is forwarded to the FCC for a (FCC) control number.

**14. LOCAL RADIOTELEPHONY DESIGNATOR ASSIGNMENTS.**

a. Local radiotelephony designators will be used only for communications with local airport traffic control towers and/or air traffic facilities for VFR operations. A Letter Of Agreement (LOA) is required between the local tower/facility and the requesting company/applicant. The LOA will contain verbiage which ensures the local radiotelephony is used only with facilities which are signatories to the agreement.

b. When a LOA expires, the local tower/facility will notify the company/applicant for renewal. Local

radiotelephony designators will not be used for filing flight plans.

c. Local radiotelephony designators are approved in accordance with FAA Order 7210.3, Facility Operation and Administration, and FCC Regulation 87.107.

d. Request for a local radiotelephony designator will be reviewed by the Regional Air Traffic Division

for adherence to criteria and forwarded with recommendations to FAA Headquarters, Airspace-Rules and Aeronautical Information Division, Air Traffic Publications Branch, ATP-210. FAA reviews then forwards the approved assignment back to the Regional Air Traffic Division for dispersion.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "L. Lane Speck".

L. LANE SPECK  
Director, Air Traffic Rules and Procedures Service